Speech by the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony at the opening of the VII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.



The chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony spoke at the opening of the VII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which took place in the capital of Kazakhstan fr om 13th to15th September 2022.

Your Excellency
Deeply-esteemed Kasym Zhomart Kemelevich,

Your Holiness,

Your Beatitude,

Honourable religious leaders and dear participants,

Today the Republic of Kazakhstan for the seventh time now has invited all of us to gather in its welcoming capital so that we have a chance to talk about issues that are of concern for all of humankind, to exchange opinions, and, what is especially important, speak as it were eyeball-to-eyeball with each other. The coronavirus pandemic which has enveloped the entire globe has demonstrated our collective vulnerability and has compelled us to look again at the way we relate to each other. We have started to communicate with each other at long distance more often, while interpersonal communication has become some sort of privilege. The pandemic is a challenge to all humankind and has shown the importance for religion in society. Religious activists have always gathered the faithful into communities and larger religious organizations. The purpose of an interreligious forum is for us to overcome interreligious division and act together by transcending the barriers which separate our traditional religions. This does not touch upon our teachings or dogmatic beliefs; rather, we are concerned with our role in the life of society.

Political, economic and public conflicts are ever more engulfing practically the whole world. We are called to build such a world whereby there are no first-class and second-class types of people, wh ere there is no hegemony and satellite countries, but a world constructed upon the loftiest moral values gifted to us by the Almighty.

On behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church, I would like to express gratitude to the organizers of this event who, in spite of objective difficulties, have made it possible to gather us all here today and allow us to engage in genuine brotherly conversation. Recent events have demonstrated the real power of the weapon of information. We have all seen how easy it has been to create within the informational sphere the image of the enemy, point an accusing finger at him and encourage hatred to all those who have some connection with him.

The world community is at present undergoing a very complex period. The polarization between individual countries and centres of power has become as strong as never before. The threat of mass

hunger has become very apparent, as has the threat of global conflict and even the threat of nuclear catastrophe. Today, responsibility for peoples' destinies and for their moral state lies upon us religious leaders. Historically, it has transpired that faith remains the sole barrier separating humankind from chaos and anarchy. At the most difficult times of human history people have turned towards God for help because they have no other hope. Our task, then, as religious leaders is to mentor people, to give them hope, to console them, and reconcile them with God and with each other.

The paradigm of mass culture, which until recently the defenders of the secular and even the atheistic outlook offered us, is no longer sustainable. Within this value system everything is constructed upon the worship of the human person as the highest being. This entails the worship of his desires, passions and bad behaviour. The cult of egocentricity has brought with it the erasure of the values of married life, the family and respect for the elderly. It has brought with it the elevation of human sinful behaviour and deviations over the values of a healthy society, which have come to us through the inspiration of the Maker and which have been preserved for millennia.

And we can be sure that today's events on the world stage, including the threat of hunger and world war, are nothing other than the consequences of encouraging human sin. We should ask ourselves why the world community is so little concerned about the situation in the so-called 'third world'. Why are those who form public opinion silent on the persecution of Christians in some countries in Africa and Asia, on the threat of hunger in the poorer countries? Why are terrorism and extremism not taken seriously when they come ever more to the fore at times of crisis and convulsions? I hope that at the present forum the participants will discuss the many acute and even awkward issues which the present day poses before us.

A response, of course, to all of these challenges is impossible without the extensive dialogue of religious leaders, without the ability to listen and hear each other. Therefore, the dialogue of religions, the broad development of religious education and the unity of the faithful on the basic commonalities of morality is the best response to the challenges of contemporaneity. It is vital that we remember that religion transcends political boundaries. Every religious tradition offers to the human person not only an inner world but also an outer world, for if we are not at peace with God and with each other, we cannot be at peace with those beyond our confines. Here I would like to recall the words of Christ: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your sour soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22.37-40).

In conclusion, on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church and her First Hierarch His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill I would like to wish the participants successful and fruitful

labours for the good of the world.

I thank you for your attention.

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